A sign in front of Bamberger Hall contains the following learning goal: “Graduates of Westminster College will achieve…global consciousness, social responsibility, and ethical awareness.” Last summer, Honors students Ben Rackham, Ashley Pedersen, Sharayah Coleman, and Blakely Neilson took steps towards this goal by spending time in Africa and Washington D.C.

Ben and Ashley went to Kenya for two weeks with the group YouthLINC to volunteer at an orphanage and a school for deaf children. For Ashley, it was an eye-opening experience. “I knew the people were poor and sick,” she says, “but I couldn’t have imagined the extent.” Going through cities that most Americans would consider slums and spending time in the ramshackle kitchens of families who cooked on the ground, she came to realize the importance of meeting others face-to-face to understand their lives. “You can make more informed decisions when you know about other cultures,” she explains, “and you understand yourself better too.”

For Ben, the time in Kenya was also valuable. The friendliness and happiness of the people particularly impressed him. “They would run out of their shops yelling ‘Jambo!’ (which means Welcome)….and they loved to sing. Here (in America) music is on the radio—it’s formalized. But there, everyone on the street is singing,” he enthusiastically relates.

Meanwhile, Sharayah visited the neighboring country of Uganda with the grassroots organization Come, Let’s Dance. She spent a month there working with a group of young Ugandan men who, feeling called to serve their community, started a church and an orphanage. It was a humbling experience for Sharayah as she taught bible lessons to forty kids in a tiny room with a dirt floor, formed friendships with people like Florence, a twenty-three year-old widowed mother of two, and ate a chicken that Florence’s parents killed in Sharayah’s honor. “There is nothing like being immersed in another culture to give you perspective,” she says. “I realized there were things in American culture I didn’t know I valued so much (like our efficiency), and things I wish could change like how little we value relationships compared to Ugandans.”

A bit closer to home, Blakely spent two months in Washington D.C., working as an intern for the Anti-Trafficking in Persons Program and taking classes at Georgetown. “D.C.,” she says, “has a whole different feel from Salt Lake. It’s so political; everyone is connected.” Spending time there, she learned more about herself and what she wants to do after she graduates.

Ask an American the first thing they think of when they think of a place they have never been. Their answer might resemble the following—Africa: impoverished; Washington D.C.: home of the White House. But these stereotypical answers say little about the reality of a city, country, or continent, failing to give a sense of the culture, the people, and the problems. In order to understand these, one must experience places for themselves. As famous dancer and European traveler Isadora Duncan once said, “What one has not experienced, one will never understand in print.”

-Meghan Hekker
Are You a Bigfoot?
Honors Students Learn Their Ecological Shoe Size

On October 30th, Freshmen Honors students took a break from their Halloween preparations and stepped into Environmental Center Director Kerry Case's Living Arts lecture on environmental sustainability. During the presentation, students experienced a rude awakening to their impact on the local environment and learned actions they can take to make their world a greener place for future generations.

First, the students visited www.myfootprint.org to determine their "ecological footprint"—the relative acreage of biologically productive land it takes to sustain their lifestyles. Many of the students were surprised to find out that their way of life takes up to 26 acres of land to support them alone. Even Case admitted that her footprint is 38 acres, a number that would require 8.7 Planet Earths to sustain everyone with the same standard of living.

Not to be disheartened, the students then brainstormed ideas to help make their lives more sustainable on campus. Some of the suggestions included the following:

- Buy local food
- Carpool/walk/bike
- Turn off electronics and lights during the night
- Recycle
- Learn more about climate change
- Promote environmental education initiatives

Students also discovered some interesting facts about energy use at the college. The Eccles Health, Wellness, and Athletic Center runs primarily on solar power during the day, and 10 percent of campus electricity is generated by wind power. Westminster already coordinates with the Salt Lake City Recycling Center and Westminster President Michael Bassis recently signed the American College and University President's Climate Commitment contract. This contract declares that the college will work toward complete energy sustainability as technology and ecological awareness increases in the coming years.

Eco-conscious students then learned that since 2003, Utah has been consuming more foods and goods than it can produce annually. Thus, in the coming years, Utah may slip into an environmental and economic deficit. The Salt Lake Valley already has high pollution levels and 67 percent of its fresh water goes directly to the upkeep of non-native landscaping. The heavy migration into the state is also pressuring these resources.

While this extreme consumption rate can be unsettling, Case left the students with some reassuring advice. "Consuming 'stuff' does not equal happiness," she told them. "Since 1950, we’ve been consuming more and more, and our happiness index has plummeted. If I leave you with anything tonight, it would be this truth: You won't be happier by consuming more—trust me—but you still have time to change the course of history." -Kaitlyn Thomas

Classical Greek Theatre Comes to Westminster Campus

Sing in me, O Muse, of the new alliance between the Honors program and the Classical Greek Theatre Festival from the University of Utah's Department of Theatre, an alliance that presented Westminster students with an exclusive performance of Euripides' classic play “Helen,” directed by Barbara Smith. After 37 years of public and private performances for the University of Utah and Brigham Young University, the Festival performers brought their art to the Westminster campus for the first time.

The September 29 performance was open to all Westminster students, but freshmen Honors students comprised the majority of the audience. The students had read and analyzed the text of “Helen” in their Honors Humanities seminar. Thus, this performance promised to particularly intensify these students' understanding of classical Greek drama. The rainy weather prevented the performance from taking place outside, as originally planned, and forced it into the warm atrium of the Emma Eccles Jones Conservatory.

The beautiful golden set, designed by Westminster’s own Nina Vought, featured a pair of watchful sphinxes beside a covered portico, two jade columns connected by a panel of hieroglyphics, and a vast glittering desert backdrop.

Before beginning the show, dramaturg Jim Svendsen welcomed the audience with an enthusiastic introduction to classical Greek theatre. He explained the story of Helen and how her beauty inspired a thousand Greek ships to sail afar and face the Trojans. Euripides, however, alters the original tale, placing Helen in Egypt for the entirety of the ten year conflict. By focusing his script on Helen's struggle to return to Sparta, Euripides addresses questions about justice, identity, and feminine power.

The performance provided an enjoyable experience for the audience.
Research Granted: Students Impress with Use of Summer Grants

Last summer’s Honors Research Grant awardees Sharayah Coleman, Lahdan Saeed Heidarian, and Spencer Woolley presented the findings of their independent summer research projects in Nunemaker on Friday, October 26, 2007.

The program’s Independent Summer Research Grants offered these students an opportunity to get research experience while exploring a topic of personal interest. While this year’s group of researchers presented some fascinating work, they had to be more than fascinating to merit a grant of $2,300 from the Honors program. Each participant displayed diligence, ability, and a strong work ethic. The application is an intense process itself, to say nothing of the work demanded by the actual research project. “The application process is really long…and it seems to be that way…on purpose,” said Spencer Woolley, describing his experience of applying for the grant. Spending hours upon hours in the Writing Center on campus wrestling with the research proposal materials seemed a common aspect of the process for all three grant winners. The abstracts describing the projects demanded the most attention; as one recipient said, “the abstract is your baby.” The recipients all agreed that they spent hours in painstaking revision of their proposals before turning them in to Honors program Director Richard Badenhausen.

Once submitted for review, the Honors Council, which consists of two Honors student representatives, six professors, and two college staff members, decides which grant proposals merit the opportunity to become full-fledged research. Badenhausen explained, “The Honors Council really struggles with these decisions, since so many of the project proposals are interesting; but over the years, the committee has developed a detailed rubric by which to measure the quality of the work, and so the process is very collaborative and efficient.”

According to the awardees, the research experience is fun, challenging, and enlightening. Woolley used his grant money to travel to the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles, where he analyzed the artwork on ancient Greek pots. Coleman utilized her grant to purchase the many books needed for her philosophical endeavor, a feminist exploration of some religious texts. Heidarian purchased expensive laboratory supplies that allowed her to measure cortisol levels in human saliva. The Honors research grant opened the door for undergrads to experience an independent learning experience. Each recipient reported personal and intellectual growth due to receiving this grant and pursuing their research. In terms of preparing these students for post-graduate endeavors and promoting the Honors program goal of creating motivated, independent, and informed students, the entire process of applying, researching, writing, and presenting proved to be invaluable.

Each recipient completed the grant with the final presentation and a paper. The two humanities projects resulted in papers 20 to 60 pages long. The science project has evolved into Heidarian’s senior project. She hopes to present a more complete version of her work at the Westminster Undergraduate Research Fair in the spring. -Scott Terry

Summer Research Grants

Sharayah Coleman:
“When Mother Knows Best: A Maternal Reexamination of the Interpersonal Claim to Know God”

Lahdan Heidarian:
“Laugh Away the Stress: Salivary Cortisol Samples and the Effects of Laughter on a College Population”

Spencer Woolley:
“Molon Labe and Allahu Akbar: A Comparison between the Greco-Persian War and the Second Invasion of Iraq”

Congratulations!

The Westminster College’s Honors program website was awarded second place at this year’s National Collegiate Honors Council convention in the small college website competition. The site was praised for its thorough content, nice color scheme, and user-friendliness.

Check it out at www.westminstercollege.edu/honors
Student News & Notes

Jillian Samels and Ommar Bribiesca successfully petitioned the Eccles Health, Wellness, and Athletic Center for an additional ballroom dancing class.

Marie Robinson received a $1,000 stipend from the Michael Family Foundation for doing an internship with a non-profit agency (Salt Lake County Mayor Corroon's Office of Environmental Policy). Adam Martin, a student at the U of U, recently asked her to marry him. She happily accepted.

Amanda Ruiz, with Robin Hill and Natasha Bashir-Din, will be organizing the Social Science Club event “Swim for Sudan” on December 1, all the proceeds of which will go to their Southern Sudanese Illiteracy Eradication Project.

Robin Hill and Amanda Ruiz presented about the Social Science Club at the National Collegiate Honors Conference in Denver.

Stacy Blaylock is helping to build a quality recycling program on the Westminster campus by educating students and staff about recycling. She is also planning an extravaganza for Roots N Shoots to promote recycling during the week of Earth Day.

Ashley Pedersen has accepted the position of Program Coordinator for Student Leaders in Civic Engagement (SLICE) with the Center for Civic Engagement on campus. SLICE provides the framework and resources for students to adopt a leadership role regarding a particular social issue and partner with other Westminster students, faculty and staff, as well as members of the community, in order to address that issue.

Sarah Hatch recently accepted a position at Hill Air Force Base in the Contracting Department. She is also one of eleven students accepted into Westminster's Alumni Mentoring Program.

Paula Porter caught a 200 pound halibut while fishing in Homer, Alaska.

Getting their foot in the door: Honors Freshmen at a Glance

Why did you decide to participate in the Honors program?

“I love smart people; intelligence goes hand-in-hand with ambition, so it gives any educational activity such a competitive feel. At the same time it’s a very close group because it’s so small, which is also a great appeal to the elitist aspect of my ego.” -Erika Rodriguez

“The Honors program attracted me because it seemed like a way to become a better thinker and therefore a better teacher and overall human being. It’s a great opportunity to capitalize on the undergraduate experience in such a small school.” -Stacy Blaylock

“I decided to participate in the Honors program because of the opportunities it offers to grow and learn, the experience of being with other people who desire to discuss and think critically, and because of the ability to avoid basic and boring LE classes.” -Cody Proulx

“An opportunity to challenge myself and open new doors.” -Chris Roundy

“I’ve always enjoyed challenging myself so the Honors program just made sense. Also, I wanted to get out of those L.E.s!!!” -Allie Roach

“I want to push myself.” -David Marsener-Gonzales

“I just thought that it sounded like a great experience and I couldn’t stand it if I didn’t try to achieve as much as I am able to; I couldn’t just slack off and not even attempt being an Honors student.” -Lauren Robinson
Living Arts Spotlight: Alix Ohlin

Alix Ohlin, author of “The Missing Person”

For the past four years incoming Honors students have read a common text over the summer and discussed it at orientation to simulate the kind of learning that takes place in Honors classrooms. The college’s new Common Ground program seeks to create a yearlong discussion about one of the four landscapes that surround the campus: desert, lake, mountain and city. To compliment both the Honors summer common read and Westminster College’s new Common Ground program, the incoming freshmen Honors students were asked this year to read Alix Ohlin’s debut novel, “The Missing Person.” Ohlin describes her plot as “a love story, but also a murder mystery” in the desert. Striking a balance between being a relaxing summer read and a thought-provoking experience, the novel has a complex plot about loss, family, and growing up. It uses a host of interesting characters to explore the environmental problems associated with the desert.

Ohlin agreed to speak with Honors students Tuesday, September 26 as part of the program’s Living Arts seminars. She offered insight into the publishing world, her writing process, how she became a writer, and the various characters and plots of the novel. Students were especially concerned with how to treat the desert and its relation to the people that live in it. One main theme of the plot includes eco-terrorists fighting for the rights of the desert. On one hand, the eco-terrorists of her novel seem to have a good cause: it doesn’t make sense to build metropolises and private pools on desert land that is already short on water. On the other hand, the eco-terrorists never seem to accomplish any meaningful changes by draining a few pools, vandalizing property, and starting fires. Ohlin responded that, in writing an “environmentalist novel,” she simply aimed to present a problem and show the characters’ different responses. She says the solution is still unknown. Furthermore, books that claim to have an answer usually appeal to people who think they also know the answer; she was trying to avoid that trap.

Students asked Ohlin for advice on their own writing. She reminded students that writing is a process and that understanding usually comes at the end of writing. She also said that her editors did a lot to help with the process of her novel—they even came up with the title for her book! Ohlin surprised students when she revealed that she didn’t pick the picture on the cover or write the short description on the back; they are both marketing decisions made by the publisher. Students appreciated her candid approach to the seminar and insights into her writing process.

-Amanda Hobbs

Student News & Notes

Chert Griffith, Lindsey Roper, Sara Rees, and Sarah Hatch presented about the Living Arts Seminar at the NCHC.

Tracy Hansford performed with the Westminster Players in “The Most Massive Woman Wins.”

Dallen Ford is currently serving an LDS mission in Bacolod, Philippines. He plans to rejoin the Honors program after his two year mission is completed.

Blakely Nielson, as part of the Westminster Ethics Bowl team, has qualified to participate in the Ethics Bowl National Championships in San Antonio, Texas in February 2008.

Jen Niedfeldt is a member of the Westminster Climate Task Force, the secretary for the Theater Society, and played Dorine in Westminster’s production of “Tartuffe.”

John Cook and Paula Porter presented at the NCHC about creating the first-ever Westminster Mock Trial Team.

Spencer Woolley presented his summer’s research, “Searching for Sanctity,” at the NCHC.

Lenni Keyes will graduate in December with an Honors certificate and a bachelor’s degree in Communication. She has accepted a position with Salt Lake magazine as Production Coordinator.

Tiana Smith will graduate in December with an Honors degree and a bachelor’s degree in English.

Blakely Nielson received the Overall Academic Excellence Award at the Engalitcheff Institute on Comparative Political and Religious Systems in Washington, D.C. in August. The award is presented to three students out of a class of 124 at the institute.
Kaitlyn Thomas

Last summer, in the City of Sin, Kaitlyn Rose Thomas took her first dive into the world of political campaigning as an intern at the Nevada Headquarters for Chris Dodd’s Presidential campaign. Presidential hopefuls are focusing on Nevada, especially early in the presidential race, because it is the site of the second caucus, preceded only by Iowa’s. Therefore, working in Nevada provided Kaitlyn with an exciting atmosphere for learning the ins and outs of campaigning and an excellent opportunity for networking.

Kaitlyn, who came to Westminster from Indiana, has long been drawn to politics, enjoying its scope and its capacity for change. She enjoys the political satire of Jon Stewart and Steven Colbert. Her interest became concern after George W. Bush defeated Al Gore in 2000 and then John Kerry in 2004. She felt these events sent the government down an inappropriate path and felt compelled to help make the change she wished to see. So when the opportunity to join the political campaign of a democrat presidential hopeful presented itself, she seized it. While Chris Dodd has not reached the celebrity status of Hillary Clinton or Barack Obama, he is arguably more qualified than either, according to Kaitlyn, and has the reputation for proposing novel solutions to difficult problems.

As an intern, Kaitlyn performed a range of duties including many that befit an employee with much more experience, such as conducting phone surveys, wining and dining with senator Dodd and many of his most esteemed supporters, attending parades, rallies, and interest group events as an official representative of the senator, and performing various office related duties. She flew with the senator on a private plane to Reno to serve as one of his representatives. And most impressive of all, she wrote a summary of a session of the Nevada legislature which Dodd used in a number of speeches. Her exceptional work ethic, charisma, and ability won over the hearts of potential campaign contributors and fellow campaigners alike, providing her with a foundation for a possible career in politics. -Jesse Resnick

Faculty Profile

Dave Goldsmith

Many college students expect a momentous event accompanied by thunderous drums to descend upon them and direct their lives; however, David Goldsmith, co-professor of the Honors seminar “History and Philosophy of Science,” believes that many of life’s most profound and defining moments can only be recognized as such in retrospect. He found his humble beginnings in Connecticut, which he fondly describes as “vanilla.” Like most isolated upbringings, his childhood in Connecticut instilled within him the false belief that everywhere else in the world must look like where he was. This misconception was dispelled by a series of events initiated by a casual decision he made in high school: after taking a series of computer programming classes, he earned enough free credit hours to take a class simply because it interested him—he chose one on dinosaurs.

This introduction to paleontology ignited within Dr. Goldsmith a passion for history and a unique conception of time that he carried with him when he began his undergraduate career at Colgate University, where he graduated in the same class as Richard Badenhausen’s brother. However, even the transition to college life failed to rid him of his naiveté, for New York was too much like Connecticut. His freshman year, he was required to take a seminar and was thrilled to find that one of the offered classes used a book he happened to own already. Coincidently, it too was a paleontology class. After this seminar, he oscillated between majors—first choosing a pre-vet emphasis, then a physics major, and then a computer science major—all the while continuing to take classes he enjoyed. Nearing the end of his undergraduate career, he realized that it was time to settle on a single area of study and found that while he was dabbling in other majors he had accumulated enough credits in paleontology to obtain a degree.

His first geographical shock occurred when he traveled across the country to Tucson on a summer geology trip. The landscape of Kansas surprised him, moving him to exclaim, “Where are all the trees?!” But the Southwestern United States left him absolutely shocked. This shock gradually became an infatuation which later, after graduate school at Harvard, aided him in choosing a career. He wanted to teach at a small college where he could encourage students to explore and could not find a school more geologically endowed than Westminster College. This incidental chain of events gave Dr. Goldsmith a remarkably novel conception of life which he describes with the phrase: “Life is what happens while you’re making other plans.” -Jesse Resnick
Students Take Westminster Honors Program’s Achievements to the NCHC in Denver

On Halloween night, ten Westminster Honors students boarded a plane for the 42nd annual National Collegiate Honors Council (NCHC) convention. They spent five days and four nights in Denver, Colorado, giving presentations about their research and activities of the past year to various Honors crowds consisting of faculty, students, and administrators from around the country. This was the biggest Westminster delegation so far to travel to the NCHC meeting.

They arrived in Denver Wednesday night, checked into the hotel, and headed straight to Denver’s infamous 16th Street Mall for a late dinner. The next day, nationally known University of Colorado history professor Patty Limerick spoke about the unharvested potential of Honors students, faculty, and staff. She called them “the most untapped resource of the twenty-first century.” Later, the Westminster group helped students from University of North Carolina at Wilmington set up and orchestrate the annual NCHC silent auction, a tradition started by students at Columbia College as a way of giving back to the host city.

Friday morning saw many of Westminster’s crowd hopping into the fastest elevators in the West to attend sessions on topics ranging from Honors service projects to student newsletters. Senior Spencer Woolley gave an exceptional 8 a.m. paper entitled “Searching for Sanctity” as part of one of the NCHC signature programs, the Student Interdisciplinary Research Panels, which is co-chaired each year by Professor Badenhausen. After his presentation, Spencer literally ran (well, at least shuffled very quickly) next door to join sophomore Amanda Ruiz for the NCHC student fishbowl, another signature event where Honors students from around the country discuss a wide-range of Honors topics in an uninterrupted, roundtable format. Later on Friday, juniors Chert Griffith, Sara Reese, Sarah Hatch, and Lindsey Roper talked to a group about “Enhancing an Honors Learning Community” through the creation of Honors Living Arts sessions. That afternoon, sophomores John Cook and Paula Porter gave a presentation entitled, “Creating an Outlet for Law-Bound Honors Scholars,” which described their founding of the first-ever Westminster Mock Trial Team and that group’s travel and competition. Senior Marie Robinson and Honors Director Richard Badenhausen joined students and directors from two other colleges to discuss the opportunities and experience they’ve garnered in Honors. After one more speaker, Dr. Badenhausen treated the Westminster coalition to a meal at Watercourse Vegetarian. A meat-free good time was had by all.

Saturday dawned with sophomores Amanda Ruiz and Robin Hill rounding out the Westminster presentations by discoursing on their formation of the Westminster Social Sciences Club, with a presentation entitled “Translating Honors Education into Global Activism.” These students left no doubt about the potential that is inherent in Honors students to change the world. At the closing banquet, the group was able to unwind, reflect on the weekend’s progress, and swap stories of questionable dinner-appropriateness. Westminster was publically recognized for helping the auction produce $2,257 for the United Way of Denver. Our students will take the lead on the auction for next year’s convention.

Much of the conference focused on getting students excited for 2008 NCHC convention, which will be held in San Antonio, Texas. The ten students who attended the Denver convention will host a discussion about their experience when the call for papers comes out soon—all Honors students are encouraged to attend.

When asked about her experience at the NCHC, Marie Robinson said “It’s a great way to get to know your peers outside of class…and it was a lot of fun.” The 2007 NCHC convention proved to be an opportunity to tap the potential of Westminster Honors students and share their achievements in hopes of motivating other scholars. Most of the 2007 group expressed interest in going to San Antonio, undoubtedly hoping to again bring the Westminster Honors program the recognition it deserves. -John Cook
Dear Friends and Colleagues,

To those of you who are reading the Honorable Mention for the first time, we say “Welcome!” To those with whom we are already familiar, we say “It’s nice to see you again!” As another year comes and goes, we hope that this letter finds you happy, healthy, and well on your way toward your chosen goals. We are excited about this new school year, and we hope that you are equally eager to move forward with us into new and exhilarating academic and personal horizons. The enumerable opportunities afforded by this institution and the Honors program are valuable resources that will open new doors and windows into whatever future you may choose to make for yourself. Uncle Ben once said, “With great power comes great responsibility.” As members of the Westminster Honors program, it is both our gift and our responsibility to actualize the difference that we know we can make in the world. We hope you will join us this next semester in a myriad of experiences, ranging from salt rims and poker faces to community outreach and an imminent softball victory.

With great expectations for our collective future,
Your Student Honors Council

The 2007-2008 Honors program peer mentors

Polygamy, Prostitution, and Vampires...Oh My!

Professors Educate Honors Students

The traditional Honors activities Pizza with the Profs and Profs Pick a Flick exceeded expectations this semester. Professors Michael Popich and Jeff Nichols chose subjects that defied the ordinary and made for fascinating discussion.

Professor Popich chose a popular vampire film entitled “Underworld: Evolution.” This was followed by a detailed discussion of whether evil is learned or intrinsic. Students explored the stereotypical dichotomy between good and evil in the context of defining “the other” in society. The movie also inspired a discussion of how the depiction of vampires in movies often mirrors society’s ideas of good and evil.

Professor Nichols surprised the students by leading a Q & A session focused on the historical development of prostitution in Utah. Focusing on the 19th and early 20th centuries, Nichols explained political climate surrounding prostitution and polygamy. Governmental ethics and treatment of illegal enterprises played a big role in the conversation. Students also learned about some of the richest and most powerful “madames” in Utah, including their past personal lives. Overall, students enjoyed these opportunities to discuss topics not often explored within a college curriculum.

-Paula Porter

Meet the SHC

Chert Griffith - President
Major: Biology
“There are three fundamental truths of the universe: The only true power is the power to create and destroy. The only true freedom is the freedom to choose. The only constant is change.” –Anon

Paula Jo Porter - Vice-President
Major: English
“There is a theory which states that if ever anybody discovers exactly what the Universe is for and why it is here, it will instantly disappear and be replaced by something even more bizarre and inexplicable. There is another theory which states that this has already happened.” –Douglas Adams

Amanda Anais Ruiz - Secretary
Major: Philosophy, Latin American Studies
“We live in a breakable takeable world, an ever available possible world, and we can make music like we can make do. For every lie I unlearn I learn something new. I sing sometimes for the war that I fight ‘cause every tool is a weapon—if you hold it right.” –Ani DiFranco

Lindsey Kolette Roper - Treasurer
Major: Neuroscience
“Only two things are infinite, the universe and human stupidity, and I’m not sure about the former.” –Albert Einstein
We spend our days attending class, reading Nietzsche, and writing papers, preparing to step out into the world with our new-found knowledge and hope for success. But there are plenty of challenges we face when taking those first few steps. I only graduated from Westminster in June, but I have gone through all of the job interviews and those first few months of work at a “real job.” Based on my experience I think the biggest challenge that Honors students face as they step out into the world is their youth.

After putting in our four years of college we finally join the real world outside of classes and papers, but when we enter it people still regard us as “young kids,” as if those years were only spent guzzling beer and partying. Maybe this is how some students are, but a majority of us have not done that. We have been doing summer research projects, completing internships, and busting our butts in Honors classes like Humanities.

Ever see a big car with a bumper sticker that reads: “I’m spending my children’s inheritance”? How about the financial services company AIG and their ad, “Never outlive your money”? That’s what’s going to be left for you. Actually, unless you do something about it, it’s going to be worse. The 80 million Baby Boomers are not only going to spend your inheritance, they are going to leave you the bill for their excess. Who will pay for the Social Security Baby Boomers have just begun to collect? If you guessed “You” it’s gold star time, and the sheer volume of people born between 1946 and 1964 will make certain that your country’s priorities are their priorities.

Before I got my job, I submitted a lot of applications. I usually made it to the interview based on my resume and experience, but then I would walk through the door and they would automatically judge me based on my age. They think, “But you are just barely out of college, can you really be prepared for this job?” When you are out there on the job hunt, you are competing with many qualified candidates. You may have just as much experience and as many skills as those other candidates, but you need to prove yourself twice as much in order to compensate for that one thing you can’t control. Your age.

This is where the Westminster experience is your most beneficial tool. You may be young, but you are definitely not unqualified. Take advantage of internships, summer research grants, volunteer opportunities, and club leadership. These are what will set you apart. Highlight those experiences in interviews so they see you can do more than write papers and take tests. Show that you have the knowledge, the skills and the maturity to fill more advanced positions.

If you take advantage of what Westminster has to offer, then you are fully capable of entering the world and getting a great job. Don’t settle. You worked hard in college and you deserve the job you want.
Cid’s remarks have reminded me that I stand between you and a free dinner, so I'll be brief. It's been over twenty years since I last spoke at a commencement or convocation, and that seems about the right interval to me. I’m not much for pomp and circumstance, I guess—I won’t even tell you that “pomp” comes from the Latin word for “display” or “procession,” and that it’s where we get the word “pompous.”

Now, I only remember one line from that speech I gave long ago. On that occasion, I said to my classmates: “None of you will ever become president of the United States.” I’ve been proven right so far, but I have no memory of where my speech went after that inspiring line—so I’ve had to come up with a new one for today.

What I can say is that I am a variation of the 18 year old who gave that speech. And so my take-away line for you today is similar: “None of you will become whatever you dream to be.” That’s silly. In reality, you will become who you are now—with variation provided by experience, by work, by chance, and by education. And you know what? That’s a fine thing, because you’re plenty smart, interesting and loveable (to someone) right now, as you are.

But before we get carried away on a self-esteem train to happy land, I want to point out, especially for the first year students out there, that you may not actually know who you are right now—because you think other people’s thoughts. It’s not your fault; that’s been your meal ticket; but now it’s time to think for yourself if you want to be your own person. Of course, some people never do, because it isn’t as easy as it sounds.

Luckily, college is the perfect place to find out what you think, because you’re not yet being paid to do someone else’s work, nor thinking for someone else’s profit. You’re in a fine place between the serving of two masters—your family up to now, your employer after you graduate. For four years (longer if you’re lucky), you can be the master of your thoughts. Don’t hand that power over to anyone, least of all your professors.

So, how do you figure out who you really are in college? Most of all, you’ll want to change how you think about all your classes. Your classes need to be about you, not us, not the faculty. You’ll want to learn how to think about the subjects you choose to study, not what to think. But there’s an obstacle.

Usually, students have been trained to think of themselves as little knowledge containers, waiting to have their heads filled by teachers, the knowledge providers. This flatters both parties in different ways. It makes professors feel good because we get to act smart and dispense wisdom (like I’m pretending to do now); it makes students feel good because they can be passive receivers who know the drill: repeat the professor’s thoughts back on the test or in the paper. The professor is pleased to be right, and the student is pleased to get the good grade.

Notice, however, that you will learn very little about yourself if you follow this model too successfully. After four years, you will have mastered what your professors think—well done—but you may have little idea of what you actually think about all those topics you studied. And if you don’t know what you think, only what your parents or your friends or your professors think, I put it to you that you are not a genuine, independent person. If you think other people’s thoughts, you don’t know who you are. And if you don’t know that, get ready for a life of frustration as you pursue the goals of others.

Instead of that daunting prospect (I’m creating a false dilemma here, but it’s nice rhetorically), try taking each of your college classes to find out something about yourself. Your skills, your interests, your weaknesses and strengths—but most of all, what you really enjoy working hard at perfecting. Find something that challenges you to improve what’s best about this person that you are learning to become. While Uncle Steve keeps saying that you’d be a great doctor, maybe playing Xbox all day fulfills who you really are.

So, try this: when you take a class, remember that you are working for yourself, not for the professor. You’re here to improve yourself, not please the teacher. Think of the professor as the spur and guide to your project and your inquiry, not as some neutral knowledge provider who wraps up the meaning of a semester in a letter grade. Self-knowledge cannot be graded. In other words, I encourage you to make college about learning who you are, because that’s who you get to be the rest of your life.

Dr. Nick More at Convocation, 2007
Summer Research Grants
The following are excerpts from Honors students’ summer 2007 research projects

Sharayah Coleman:
“When Mother Knows Best: A Maternal Reexamination of the Interpersonal Claim to Know God”

The following piece is an excerpt from the introduction to Sharayah’s research paper.

Despite modernity’s insistence upon valuing the scientific and the secular, the world is still being radically shaped by the spiritual. Popular thinkers in the humanities have only examined spirituality from a limited perspective, preventing crucial insights that could help a global community threatened by moral and religious conflicts. These thinkers, and consequentially educated laypeople, need to reexamine important spiritual assertions. Specifically, they must determine appropriate criteria to evaluate the socially and individually potent claim “I know God.” Following the philosophical trends of the Enlightenment era, the popular criteria to justify knowledge depend upon objectivity and value-neutrality. The proposed research will challenge this current means of justification, exposing its inability to adequately evaluate a claim to know some person. Embodied and engaged knowing creates more appropriate criteria for justifying such claims to knowledge. As evidenced by examinations Jewish theologian Martin Buber’s writing and the accounts of Christian mystics, this knowing offers more sufficient and relevant justification criteria for the ultimately erotic claim to know the Biblical God. By providing a coherent and adequate means of justifying the claim “I know God,” shifting the epistemic paradigm to accept an embodied and engaged, or in other words, a maternal means of knowing will create more epistemically responsible individuals and society.

Lahdan Heidarian:
“Laugh Away the Stress: Salivary Cortisol Samples and the Effects of Laughter on a College Population”

The following piece is the abstract for Lahdan’s research project.

Existing empirical evidence regarding benefits of humor and laughter is less convincing than popular-media suggests. Evidence that supports laughter as therapeutic and indicative of good health remains controversial and inconsistent. By employing novel techniques of measuring cortisol in saliva samples, numerical data is obtained through repeatable and reliable measures. Salivary cortisol samples were taken from participants prior to, immediately and twenty minutes after viewing laughter inducing comedians or an emotionally neutral documentary. The samples were analyzed by immunoassay from Salimetrics Laboratory, PA. The Positive and Negative Affect Scale was administered prior to experimental manipulation to assess baseline feelings of well-being. The Multidimensional Humor Scale, the Humor Styles Questionnaire and Positive and Negative Affect Scale were administered following experimental manipulation to assess each individual’s sense of humor, humor style, and possible change in well-being. These previously validated measures were taken to evaluate whether an individual’s sense of humor or humor style effects their physiological and affective reaction. It is predicted that laughter rapidly decreases an individual’s level of cortisol while also improving self-assessed feelings of well-being. This research leads to a better understanding of physiological effects of laughter as well as its potential for psychological benefit.

Spencer Woolley:
“Molon Labe and Allahu Akbar: A Comparison between the Greco-Persian War and the Second Invasion of Iraq”

The following piece is an excerpt from the introduction to Spencer’s research paper.

Some twenty miles northeast of the Acropolis, a pile of rocks mounds in remembrance over the bodies of one hundred and ninety two Athenian citizens, who died defending their city against an invasion by the Great King of Persia. Five and a half miles southeast of Central Park, the rock piles and heaps of rubble have been cleared away; each year, two beams of light shine skyward to commemorate the two-thousand nine hundred forty-seven people that perished on September 11, 2001. Both cairn at Marathon and the Tribute in Light at Ground Zero have come to symbolize larger conflicts—an East versus West dichotomy that has existed at least since Xerxes marched into Attica. The Persian invasion of Greece during the 5th century BCE produced an enormous amount of cultural commentary on this enmity between the East and the West. Ancient literature, drama and visual art seethe with references to that conflict; the Greeks produced works reflecting their justification for the conflict and their characterization of their enemies. In the 21st century CE, the United States of America, as a political and cultural heir to Greek thought, wages war against some of the descendents of the Persian army.
Musings

From Your Editors . . .

Another year in Honors has begun and Honors students are as busy and ambitious as ever. From D.C. to Africa to Denver, (pgs. 1 & 7) we as Honors students are making our mark on the world. Reaching beyond the boundaries of Westminster College, we are realizing our potential by making an impact on a larger scale. Meanwhile at home, Honors students are moving to improve our college and community’s relationship with the environment (pg. 2). We are showing by example that you can change the world and you can make a difference, whether it is across the globe or in your own backyard.

Sadly, stepping into a new world means leaving one behind. As we prepare for the new year, we must say goodbye to one of our editors and introduce a new one. This December, Lenni ventures out to face the challenges and successes of post-graduation life. We are happy to welcome Brooke as she leaps into a new role as co-editor.

Honors students are continually learning, growing, and stretching beyond their boundaries. This exploration of the world and of ourselves ultimately determines not only who we are, but what we become. Only one question remains: we are ready for the world, but is the world ready for us?

Honorable Yours,

Sharayah Coleman
Lenni Keyes
Paula Porter
Brooke Turner

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